

MODULE 3C

Activity #4 Handout

Group #3: Bipolar Mood Disorder (Fact Sheet)

What is Bipolar Mood Disorder?

Bipolar Mood Disorder is the new name for what was once called manic depressive illness. The new name is used as it better describes the extreme mood swings - from depression and sadness to elation and irritability – that people with this illness experience.

People with Bipolar Mood Disorder experience recurrent episodes of depressed and elated or irritable moods. Both can be mild to severe.

What are the symptoms of Bipolar Mood Disorder?

Mania - Common symptoms include varying degrees of the following:

- **Elevated mood** – The person feels extremely high, happy and full of energy. The experience is often described as feeling on top of the world and being invincible.
- **Increased energy and over-activity**
- **Reduced need for sleep**
- **Irritability** – The person may easily and frequently get angry and irritable with people who disagree or dismiss their sometimes unrealistic plans or ideas.
- **Rapid thinking and speech** – Thoughts are more rapid than usual. This can lead to the person speaking quickly and jumping from subject to subject.
- **Lack of inhibitions** – This can be the result of the person's reduced ability to foresee the consequences of their actions. For example, spending large amounts of money buying things they don't really need.
- **Grandiose plans and beliefs** – It is common for people experiencing mania to believe that they are unusually talented or gifted or are kings, movie stars or political leaders. It is common for religious beliefs to intensify or for people with this illness to believe they are an important religious figure.
- **Lack of insight** – A person experiencing mania may understand that other people see their ideas and actions as inappropriate, reckless or irrational. However, they are unlikely to recognize the behaviour as inappropriate in themselves.
- **Psychosis** – Some people with Mania or Depression experience psychotic symptoms such as hallucinations and delusions.

Depression - Common symptoms include varying degrees of the following:

- **Lowered mood** – Many people with Bipolar Mood Disorder experience depressive episodes. These are similar in nature to those experienced by people who have Depression..
- **Withdrawal** – The person loses interest and pleasure in activities they previously enjoyed. They may withdraw and stop seeing friends, avoid social activities and cease simple tasks such as shopping and showering.

MODULE 3C

Activity #4 Handout

- **Loss of appetite or weight** – They may become overwhelmed by Depression, lose their appetite, lose weight, become unable to concentrate, and may experience feelings of guilt.
- **Feelings of hopelessness** – Some attempt suicide because they believe life has become meaningless or they feel too guilty to go on.
- **Delusions** – Others develop false beliefs (delusions) of persecution or guilt, or think that they are evil.
- For more information on Depression and its treatment, please see the information sheet called “What is Depression?”

Normal Moods

Most people who have episodes of Mania and Depression experience normal moods in between. They are able to live productive lives, manage household and business commitments and hold down a job.

Everyone experiences mood swings from time-to-time. This is not Bipolar Mood Disorder. It is when these moods become extreme and lead to a failure to cope with life that medical attention is necessary.

What Causes Bipolar Mood Disorder?

Bipolar Mood Disorder affects about one person in every hundred in the Canadian population. Men and women have an equal chance of developing the disorder. It usually appears when people are in their twenties, but often begins in the teen years.

Genetic Factors

Studies on close relations, identical twins and adopted children whose natural parents have Bipolar Mood Disorder strongly suggest that the illness may be genetically transmitted, and that children of parents with Bipolar Mood Disorder have a greater risk of developing the disorder.

Stress

Stress may play a role in triggering symptoms, but is not a cause of the illness. Often the illness itself may cause the stressful event (such as divorce or a failed business), which may then be blamed for causing the illness. Drugs or other physical stressors (such as jet lag) may bring on an episode.

Seasons

Mania is more common in the spring, and Depression in the early winter. The reason for this is not clear, but it is thought to be associated with the light/dark cycle, and the amount of total daily sunshine.

How Can Bipolar Disorder be Treated?

- Effective treatments are available for depressive and manic episodes of Bipolar Mood Disorder. Medications called thymoleptics (such as lithium) are an essential treatment for the entire course of the illness.
- Antidepressant medications and some psychological treatments are effective for the depressive phase of the illness. Bright light therapy may also help.
- Medications used to treat people with Bipolar Mood Disorder are not addictive.

MODULE 3C

Activity #4 Handout

- Several different medications may be used during acute or severe attacks of mania. Some are specifically used to calm the person's manic behaviour; others are used to help stabilize the person's mood or treat psychiatric symptoms. Medications such as lithium are also used as preventive measures as they help to control mood swings and reduce the frequency and severity of both depressive and manic phases.
- It may be necessary to admit a person with severe Depression or Mania to a hospital for some time.
- It can often be difficult to persuade someone that they need treatment when they are in a manic phase.
- Psychotherapy and counseling are used with medication to help the person understand the illness and better manage its effects on their life.
- With access to appropriate treatment and support, most people with Bipolar Mood Disorder lead full and productive lives.

For more information on Bipolar Mood Disorder, check out:

www.teenmentalhealth.org/product/tmh-speaks-bipolar-disorder/

Group #3: Understanding Bipolar Mood Disorder (Reporting Page)

What is Bipolar Mood Disorder?

How common is Bipolar Mood Disorder?

Describe some of the symptoms of Bipolar Mood Disorder:

What combination of factors is believed to cause Bipolar Mood Disorder?

What type of treatment is available for people experiencing Bipolar Mood Disorder?

What other kinds of support can help a person with Bipolar Mood Disorder recover?